



BIRJU'S PROBLEM

SOMA KAUSHIK

Translation
ANUPALAL

Illustrations
UTTAMKUMAR BALA



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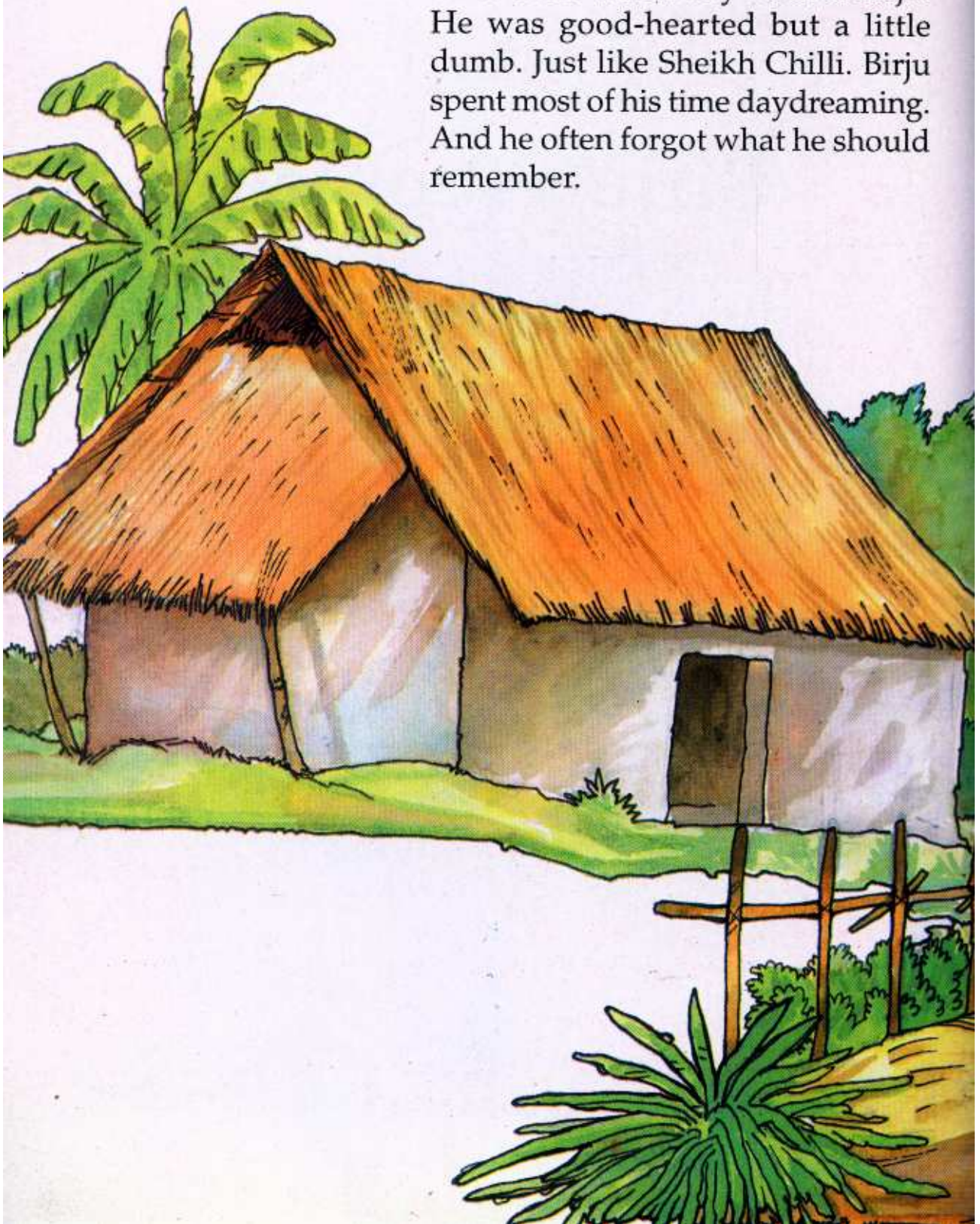
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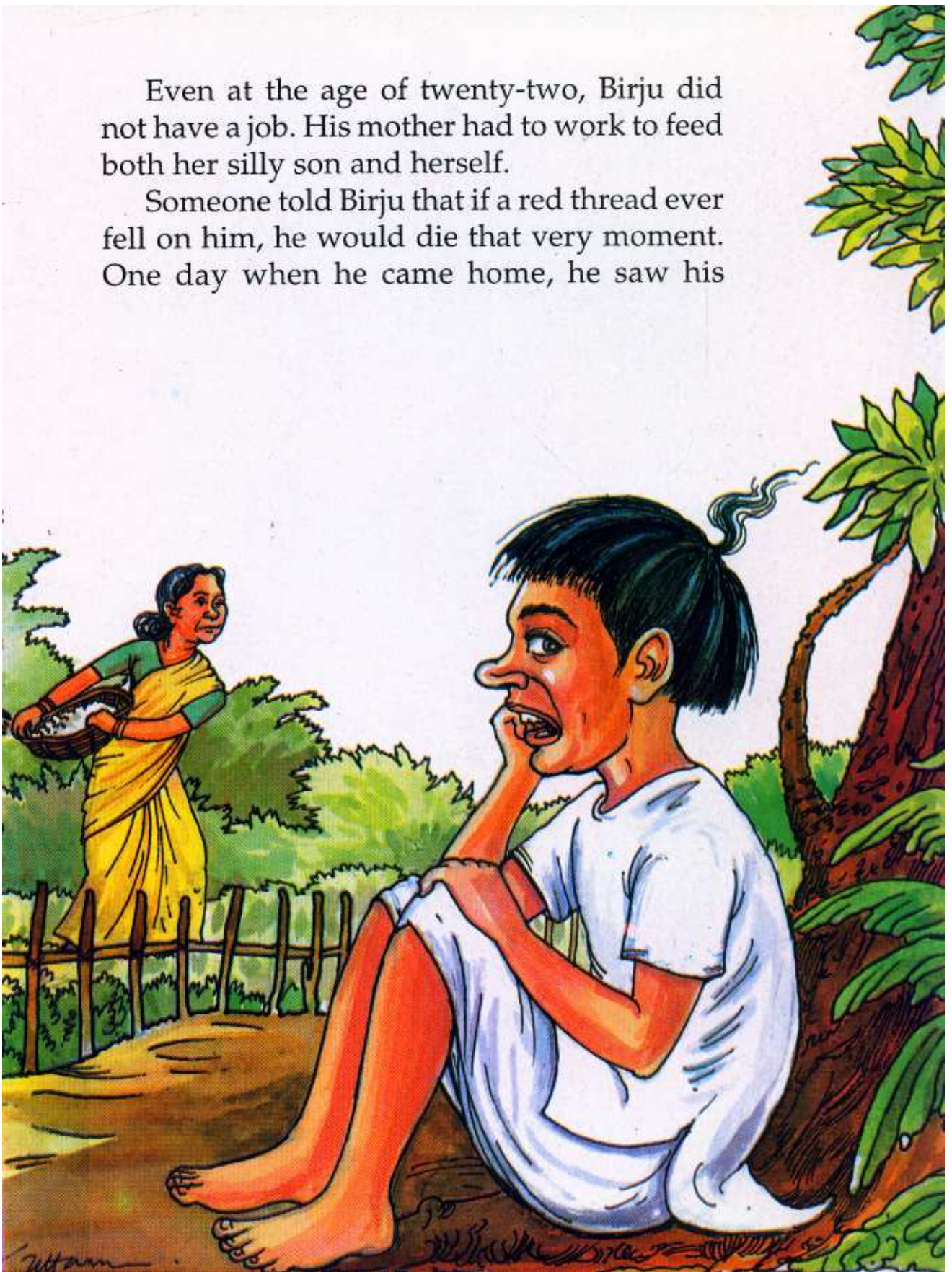
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Once there was a boy named Birju. He was good-hearted but a little dumb. Just like Sheikh Chilli. Birju spent most of his time daydreaming. And he often forgot what he should remember.



Even at the age of twenty-two, Birju did not have a job. His mother had to work to feed both her silly son and herself.

Someone told Birju that if a red thread ever fell on him, he would die that very moment. One day when he came home, he saw his



mother stitching with a red thread. A bit of the thread flew up with the breeze and landed on him.

"I'm dead! Ma! I'm dead!" Birju shouted in horror.

"Don't be silly, Birju!" said his mother. "You are very much alive." She tried her best to convince him but he did not listen.

Finally she said, "All right Birju, now do as I say. Go to Hakim Sahib. He will give you some medicine and you will come back to life."

Birju nodded happily and ran off to see the Hakim in the neighbouring village.





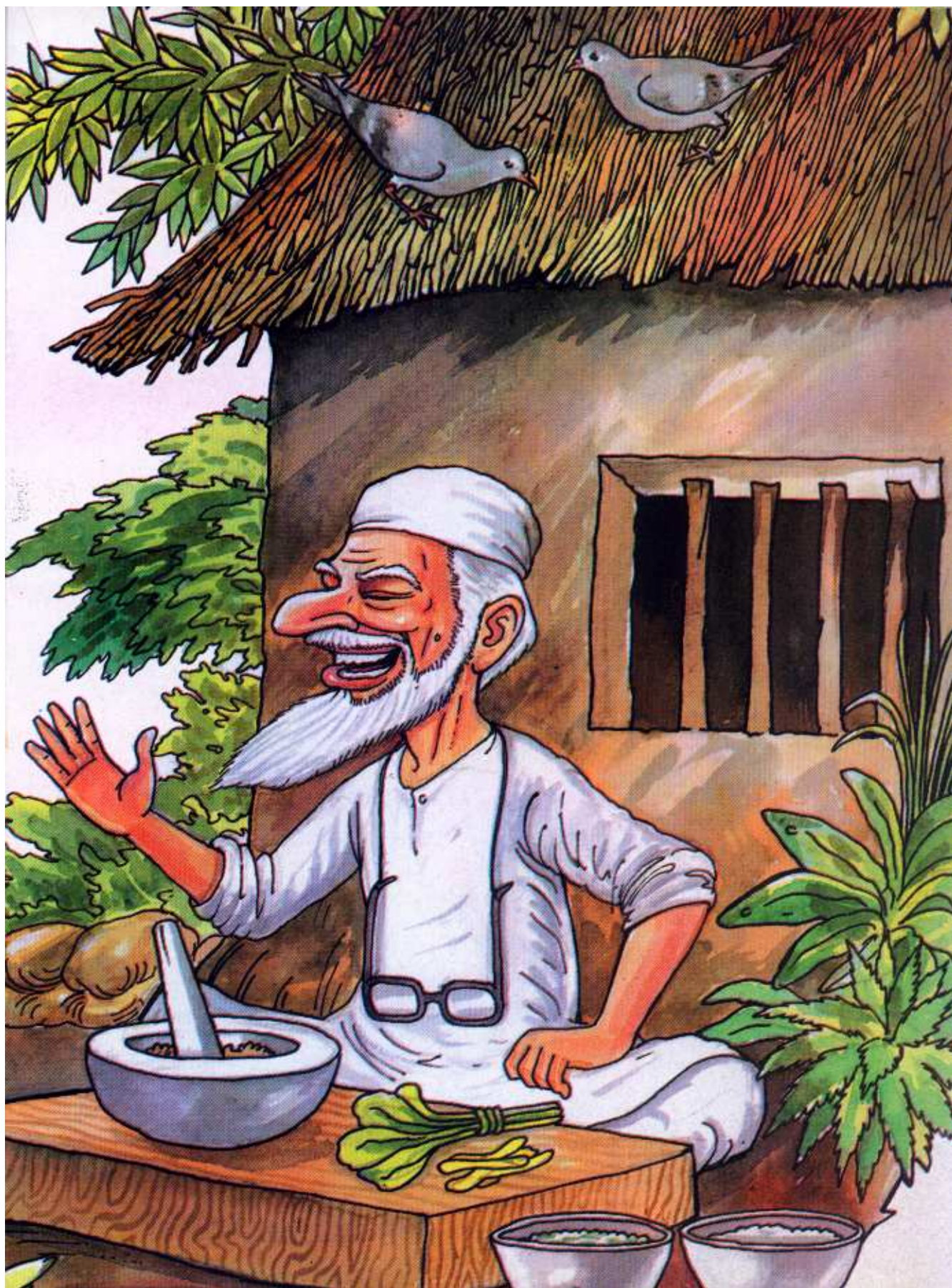
He reached Hakim Sahib and said, "Hakim Sahib, a red thread fell on me and so I'm dead. My mother said, you'll give me some medicine to make me live again."

The Hakim got puzzled and tried to convince Birju, but he did not listen. Finally the Hakim said, "Then all right Birju, now do as I say. Go back home and eat only khichdi for two days. That's your medicine. In two days you'll be alive and well again. Do you understand?" Khichdi is a simple dish made of rice and dal.

Birju nodded happily.

"And don't forget the word 'khichdi'." The Hakim knew that Birju forgot things very often.







Birju set off homewards. "Khichdi, khichdi," he went on saying aloud as he walked. On the way he saw many birds were pecking at the grains.

Birju was so delighted that he forgot 'khichdi'! Now he happily says, "Kha chidi! Kha chidi! Eat, birds, eat!" He walked on, repeating 'Kha chidi! Kha chidi!' — eat, birds, eat — instead of 'Khichdi'.

A little further, Birju came across farmers trying to shoo away birds from eating the wheat grains. When they heard Birju say 'kha chidi, kha chidi', the farmers got annoyed. They caught hold of Birju and slapped him.

They said, "You fool! Why are you encouraging the





birds by saying 'kha chidi, kha chidi'? Do you want us to lose all our grains? Say 'urr chidi, urr chidi'—fly, birds, fly—and throw stones at them too. Do you understand?"

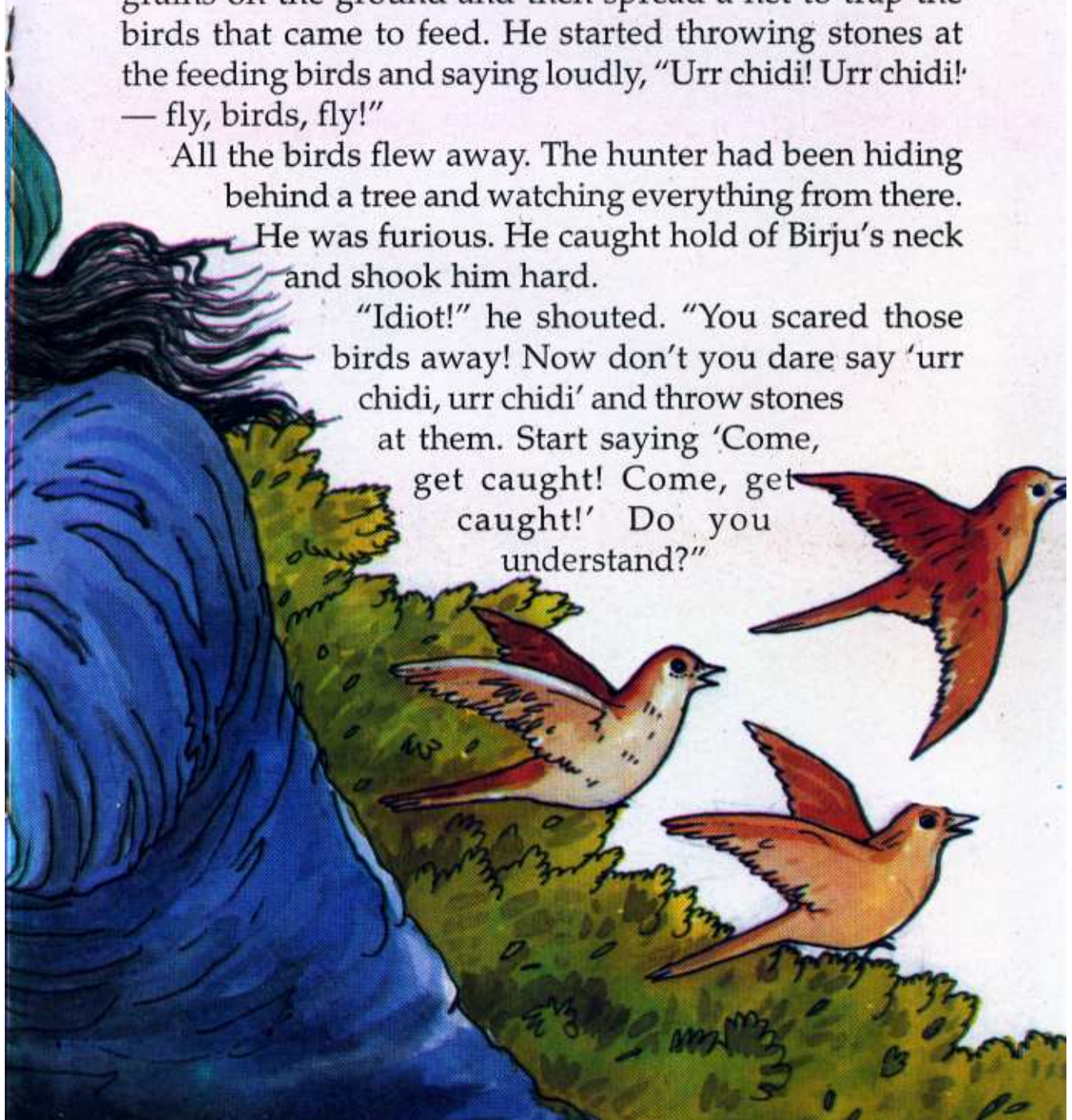
Birju nodded. The farmers had scared him. He walked on, saying 'Urr chidi! Urr chidi!' — fly, birds, fly.

Soon he came to a place where a hunter had scattered grains on the ground and then spread a net to trap the birds that came to feed. He started throwing stones at the feeding birds and saying loudly, "Urr chidi! Urr chidi! — fly, birds, fly!"

All the birds flew away. The hunter had been hiding behind a tree and watching everything from there.

He was furious. He caught hold of Birju's neck and shook him hard.

"Idiot!" he shouted. "You scared those birds away! Now don't you dare say 'urr chidi, urr chidi' and throw stones at them. Start saying 'Come, get caught! Come, get caught!' Do you understand?"

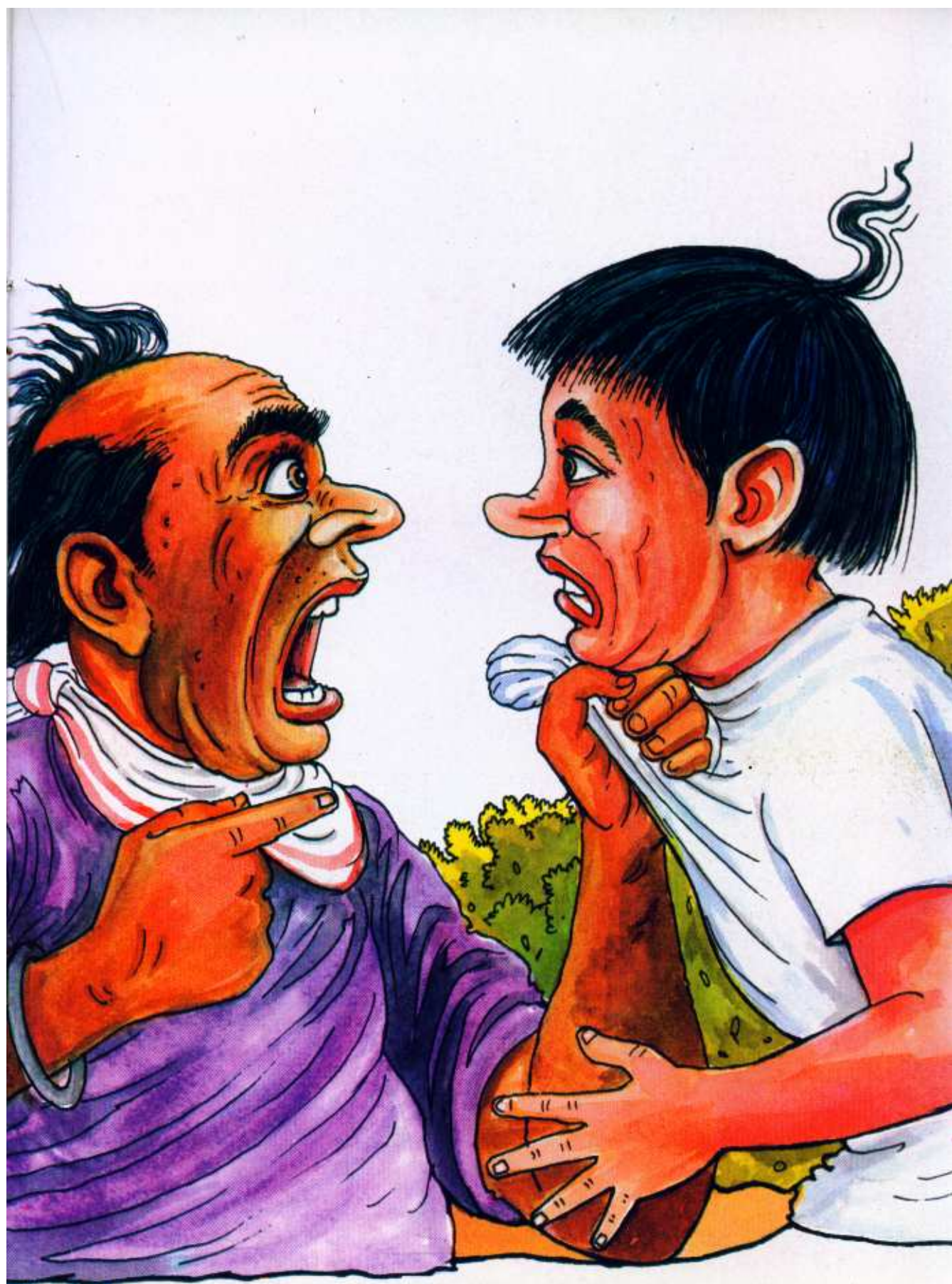


"Yes, yes!" said poor Birju. By now he had completely forgotten the word 'khichdi'. He hurried home repeating 'Come, get caught! Come, get caught!'

Some thieves were trying to hide after robbing a house. When Birju passed them saying 'Come, get caught! Come, get caught!', they became very angry as one of their companions had just been caught by the police.

"Stop that, you fool!" they rebuked Birju. "Do you want us all to get caught? Go away from here. And if you have to say something, say 'In life, in death, a thief is king'."





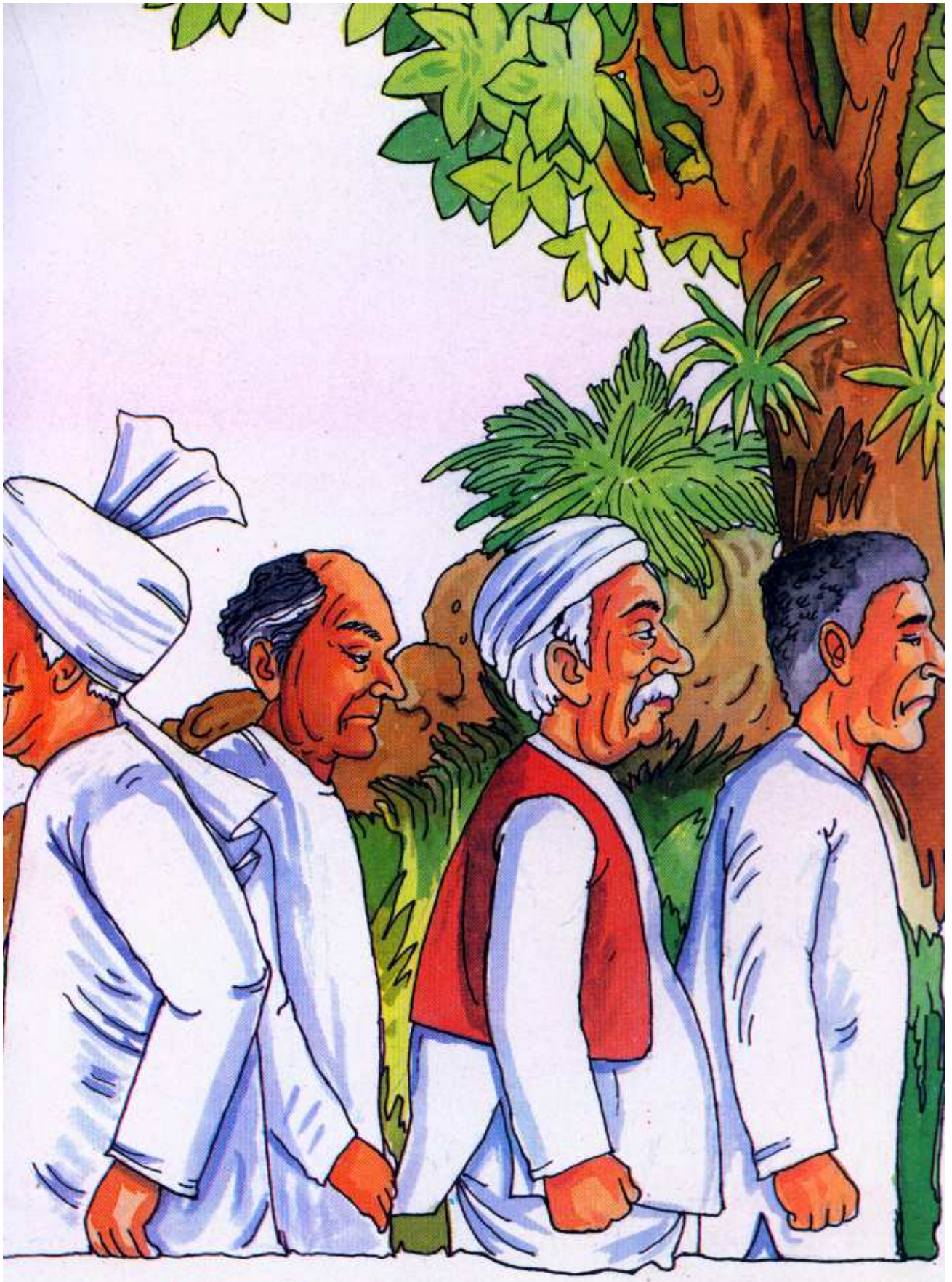
"Yes, yes," said poor Birju and rushed off, repeating loudly, 'In life, in death, a thief is king'.

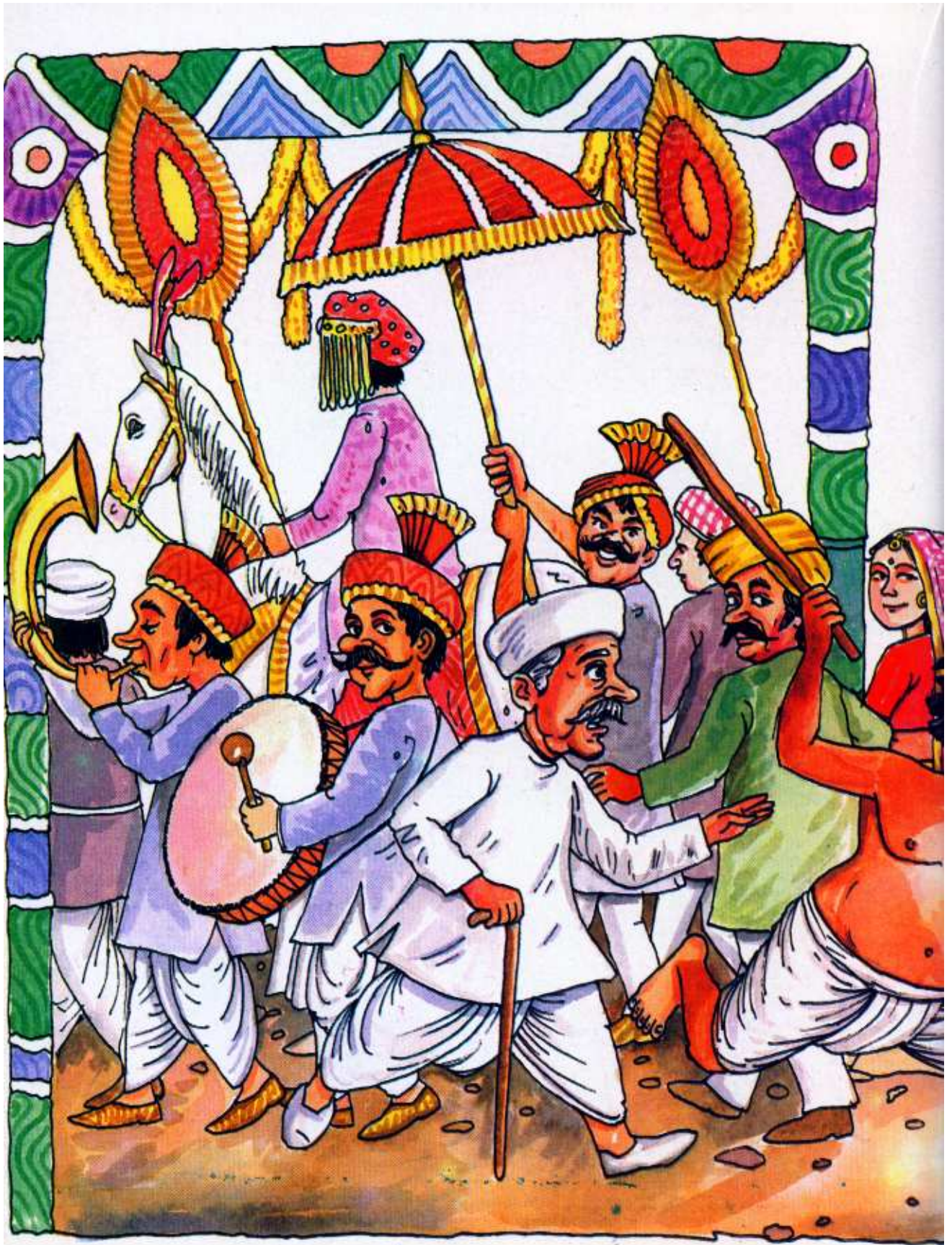
A little further he passed a funeral procession. The relatives and friends of the elderly man who had died, heard Birju declaring, "In life, in death, a thief is king!" They thought Birju was insulting the dead man by calling him a thief.

"How dare you!" they scolded Birju. "Stop what you are saying and say, 'Remember God for death is near'."

"Yes, yes!" said poor Birju and hurried away chanting 'Remember God for death is near'.



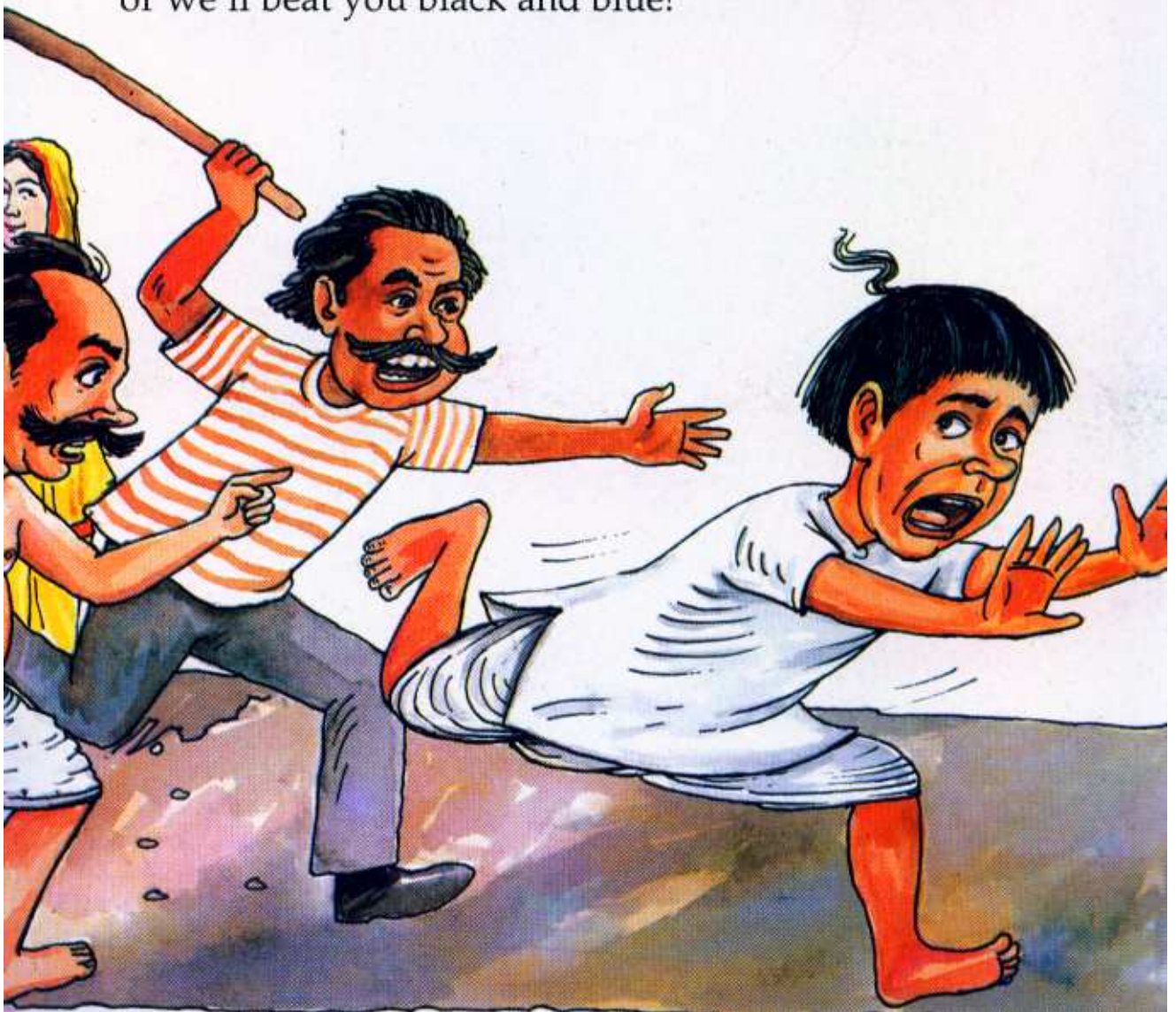




He had only gone a short distance when he saw a marriage party approaching. Some people were playing musical instruments. Some were dancing. Others were walking along, talking happily. Birju walked past them, loudly repeating, "Remember God for death is near."

When the bridegroom's friends heard, they ran after Birju to beat him up.

"You fool! You donkey!" they shouted. "Here we are celebrating and you are talking about death. Run away or we'll beat you black and blue!"



Poor Birju ran all the way home, too frightened to utter another word.

On reaching home, his mother asked, "Birju, what did Hakim Sahib say?"

Birju was silent.

"What medicine did he give you?" she asked again.

Birju still didn't answer.

Irritated by his behaviour, his mother said, "If you won't tell me, all you will get today is khichdi."



Hearing the word 'khichdi', Birju suddenly remembered what the Hakim had told him.

"Yes, yes!" he said happily. "That's my medicine! Just khichdi."

Finally, Birju ate khichdi with a thankful heart and went to sleep.





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